

## 'I'm big, you're small. I'm right, you're wrong'

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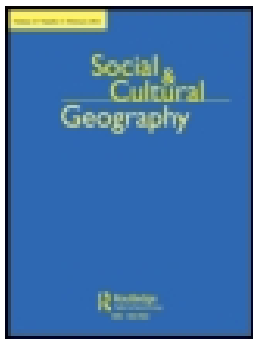
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## 'I'm big, you're small. I'm right, you're wrong': the multiple P/politics of 'being young' in new Sustainable Communities

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# 'I'm big, you're small. I'm right, you're wrong': the multiple P/politics of 'being young' in new Sustainable Communities

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## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the multiple politics of being young in new Sustainable Communities in the UK, places which were designed and built to foster active participation and inclusiveness. It is in this context that we uncover a series of rules and regulations which inhibit young people's participation in their communities. However, we also draw attention to young people's everyday politics which is broader and deeper than formal structures of participation. Through in-depth ethnographic research we get closer to understanding what an everyday politics looks and feels like from a young person's perspective. Sounds, sights and bodies all make up an everyday politics which is vital in the building and shaping of communities.

## 'Je suis grand, tu es petit. J'ai raison, tu as tort': les multiples P/politiques liées à la jeunesse dans les nouvelles collectivités durables

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article interroge les multiples politiques liées à la jeunesse dans les nouvelles collectivités durables au Royaume-Uni, des lieux pensés et bâtis pour favoriser la participation active et l'inclusion. C'est dans ce contexte que nous révélons un certain nombre de règles et de régulations qui freinent la participation des jeunes dans leurs communautés. Néanmoins, nous attirons aussi l'attention sur les politiques quotidiennes de la jeunesse qui sont plus largement et profondément ancrées que les structures formelles de la participation. Par l'entremise de recherches ethnographiques approfondies, nous améliorons la compréhension de l'image et de l'effet des politiques quotidiennes du point de vue des jeunes. Les sons, les scènes et les corps contribuent à l'élaboration d'une politique quotidienne indispensable à la construction et à la fabrique des communautés.

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## PALABRAS CLAVE

Gente joven; P/políticas; comunidades sostenibles; participación; sensorial

## **‘Yo soy grande, tú eres pequeño. Yo estoy en lo correcto, tú estás equivocado’: las P/políticas múltiples de ‘ser joven’ en Comunidades Sostenibles.**

### **RÉSUMÉ**

Este artículo aborda las múltiples políticas de ser joven en nuevas Comunidades Sostenibles en el Reino Unido, lugares que fueron diseñados y construidos para promover la participación activa y la inclusión. Es en este contexto que descubrimos una serie de reglas y regulaciones que inhiben la participación de los jóvenes en sus comunidades. Sin embargo, también llamamos la atención sobre la política cotidiana de los jóvenes como más amplia y profunda que las estructuras formales de participación. A través de una investigación etnográfica en profundidad, nos acercamos a comprender cómo se ve y se siente una política cotidiana desde la perspectiva de una persona joven. Los sonidos, las imágenes y los cuerpos forman una política cotidiana que es vital en la construcción y la configuración de las comunidades.

## **Introduction**

*‘... like Matilda, I’m big, you’re small, I’m right, you’re wrong, and there’s nothing you can do about it ...’* (Robert, male, aged 12).

In the opening quote above, Robert used the analogy of ‘Matilda’, Roald Dahl’s fictional character, to reflect on his own status as a young person in the community where he lived. His account revealed how being seen as ‘small’ and in the ‘wrong’ by others (notably adults) excluded him and other young people from spaces, times and moments of local political action, such as having a say in local decision-making. As we will go on to show, Robert’s experience was not unique. On the contrary, his vivid imagery was indicative of the multiple exclusions that young people in our research, living in a series of newly built communities in the UK, experienced on a daily basis. These findings correspond with wider academic evidence of the multiple scales of marginalisation of young lives in the UK (Wood, 2012). However, in contrast to this pervading sense of young people being and feeling marginalised, our research revealed that in certain spaces and times, young people were involved in a whole series of everyday political moments that contributed to the making of community.

This paper draws on research on young lives growing up in Sustainable Communities in the UK. Sustainable Communities is a term that describes housing planned and built as a result of the Labour Government’s (1997–2010) commitment to creating inclusive and participatory communities (ODPM [Office of the Deputy Prime Minister], 2003). As illustrated above, our research uncovered a *multiplicity of P/politics of being young* within a complex web of in/formal rules and regulations. We contribute to, and extend, recent literatures on young people and P/politics in the context of housing policies, which intend to ‘build community’ (Kallio, Hakli, & Backlund, 2015; Philo & Smith, 2013; Skelton, 2013; Wood, 2012). In our discussion, following the work of Kallio and Hakli (2015) and Wood (2015), we refer to formal spaces of political engagement (e.g. local council and

Resident Associations) as Politics and everyday knowledges, mobilities and interactions as politics.

The paper extends current knowledge in two important ways. First, it progresses wider debates regarding how young people experience and engage with P/politics in their everyday lives, including what it means to be P/political from the perspective of young people and adults. In this way we contribute to sub-disciplinary discussions on P/politics within the study of childhood (Kallio & Hakli, 2011a, 2011b; Skelton, 2013; Weller, 2003, 2007), as well as to broader debates within Human Geography and the social sciences on participation, community relations and sustainable urbanism (Bishop & Corkey, 2017; Gleeson & Sipe, 2006). Through in-depth research with young people, we shed light on what it means to be political (building on Bartos, 2012; Christensen, Hadfield-Hill, Horton, & Kraftl, 2017; Nolas, Varvantakis, & Aruldoss, 2017); we show how sound, sight and the embodied practices of politics are important facets of making and shaping community life. The second way in which the paper extends current knowledge is through the focus on young people living in newly-built communities in the UK (building on Christensen et al., 2017; Hadfield-Hill, 2012; Horton, Christensen, Kraftl & Hadfield-Hill, 2014; Kraftl, 2014; Kraftl, Horton, Christensen, & Hadfield-Hill, 2013). In this paper we draw attention to the multiple P/politics of growing up in these new spaces, challenging traditional notions of participation. It is important that the exclusions young people experience in these places are brought to the fore, at the same time as opening up the possibility for more fully recognising and respecting young people's everyday political engagements as part of the goings-on of community life.

By way of further context, the discourse of wider community inclusion and participation was central to the 'Sustainable Communities: building for the future' agenda (launched in 2003 and revoked in 2015 under the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government), a programme of new housing developments focused on 'growth areas' in the South East of the UK (ODPM [Office of the Deputy Prime Minister], 2003). Housing built in the wake of this policy was intended to address the diverse needs of residents, provide high quality accommodation, and involve local people in its planning, design and stewardship (ODPM [Office of the Deputy Prime Minister], 2003). Young people are now growing up in places built under the remit of this agenda.

In this paper we draw on research carried out in four case studies located in the Milton Keynes/South Midland growth region that saw the construction of 30,000 new homes between 2005 and 2009. Our analysis contributes to a growing literature and evidence base on the impacts of Sustainable Communities that addresses, for example, their broader Political premise (Raco, 2005), young people's mobilities (Horton et al., 2014), interactions with sustainable technologies (Hadfield-Hill, 2012) and experiences of growing up on a building site (Kraftl et al., 2013). Our contribution to this body of work is an analysis of young people's experiences of growing up in spaces which from the outset were intended to be inclusive and participatory. With the current UK Government working towards the delivery of 300,000 new homes per year (UK BBC, 2018; Government, 2016), and with the recent commitment to the construction of 14 Garden Villages and 9 Garden Towns that will deliver in excess of 200,000 new homes (Kraftl, Hadfield-Hill, & Laxton, 2018; UK Government, 2017), it is imperative to be concerned not only with the successful delivery of 'bricks and mortar' but also with the social and cultural dimensions of these housing developments.

Our examination of these issues encourages a rethinking of the ways in which everyday sights and sounds can be thought of as political and as contributing to the P/political shaping of community. In particular, we argue that young people's contribution to everyday politics is important and often enacted within zones of liminality – spaces and times of in-betweenness (Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1960). We explore this threshold positioning of young people and the opportunities it presents for everyday politics, from affectual nods and smiles, to their physical presence in community spaces. These everyday political acts contribute to a mosaic of experiences, which constitute the multiple P/politics of being young in newly-built communities, while also highlighting moments and spaces where the boundaries between P/politics are blurred (Philo & Smith, 2013). However, we are mindful of interpreting young people's encounters as political (Philo & Smith, 2013), thus through our analysis we are guided by young people's own sensory experiences of p/Politics.

The paper is structured as follows: first, we situate the research within literatures on young people's P/political participation. Second, we describe the case study communities and the ethnographic approach, providing insight into the research design and methodology. Third, we draw on qualitative data from in-depth interviews, focus groups and project workshops with over 175 young people to unpack their everyday experiences of Political exclusion, through a web of in/formal rules and regulations. Fourth, we turn our focus to the embodied, sounds and sights of everyday politics which were so vital in community life. Finally, we offer some concluding thoughts on the importance of everyday political moments in the making of newly-built communities.

## Young people, P/politics and thresholds

Childhood scholars have noted that the Political agenda in the UK frames young people as 'becomings,' where they are problematically viewed as adults in the making, with limited scope for Political engagement (see for example Skelton, 2013). Young people are subject to Political projects that 'act upon' children (Christensen, 1998) to 'protect' (and preserve) the innocence and vulnerability of youth (Wyness, 2000) (such as, protecting children online and the regulation of unhealthy school meals), or aimed at 'controlling' children (Cockburn, 1998; Neary, Egan, Keenan, Lawson, & Bond, 2013; Sharkey & Shields, 2008) through measures such as dispersal orders and regulating their behaviour. Thus, in much Political discourse young people are seen as future rather than current citizens (Cockburn, 1998; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Often it is as *future* agents of change rather than as contemporaries that local governments and stakeholders recognise the value of young people in decision-making (Baraldi, 2003). In contrast to such perspectives, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child seeks to ensure that young people are able to take part in, and be consulted on, matters concerning them (Kallio & Hakili, 2013). The convention contends that children should be given rights when articulating issues that concern them and that adults should give weight to children's voices and experiences in the present, considering them as 'beings' rather than 'becomings' (albeit subject to judgements about their age and maturity).

In previous decades, young people's involvement in Politics in the UK has most commonly focused on the macro-Political sphere (Kallio & Hakli, 2015), that is, on the large-scale, governmental and institutional moments, spaces and framings of the

Political. Over the past decade a UK citizenship agenda has emerged with the explicit aim of encouraging the active participation of young people in social, Political and environmental agendas. There is a proviso of equipping young people with the tools and motivation for future civic engagement in the challenges facing local, national and global communities (see, for example, British Youth Council, 2014; Scottish Government, 2006; Youth Citizenship Commission, 2014). Although this development is important, it reinforces the emphasis on 'becoming' a future Political agent of change, rather than equipping young people to be Political agents in the present.

Much of the practice around encouraging young people's participation seems to generate a paroxysm of activity that seeks to increase young people's involvement in decision-making, from the introduction of school councils to youth parliaments, boards and panels (Skelton, 2013; Weller, 2003, 2007). In this context, young people are involved in the citizenship project, through the process of consultation, inclusion and 'having their say.' However, a more critical literature of young people's participation raises some key considerations. These include questioning who Political projects are for, who is involved and who is being represented (Wood, 2012); the problem of tokenistic forms of engagement (Hart, 2008); questionable methods of communication which often do not allow the possibility of difference (Lansdown, 2004; Percy-Smith, 2010); and the presumption of language and in particular the spoken word as the paramount tool of communication, which has often omitted methods that may be more suited to children and young people's own cultures of communication.

Our analysis responds to calls for a focus on 'children's mundane politics' (Bartos, 2012: 159), building on recent work which addresses the place of care and friendship in shaping political identity (Bartos, 2013; Korkiamaki & Kallio, 2018); children's daily political practices (Bartos, 2012); multiscalar political worlds of childhood (Kallio & Hakili, 2013); and the role of political talk in everyday life (Nolas et al., 2017). Collectively these literatures get closer to understanding how young people encounter, experience, enact and negotiate everyday politics. We are led by Staeheli, Ehrkamp, Leitner, and Nagel (2012, p. 630) in focusing on the 'seemingly mundane acts or micropolitics ... that hold the potential to nudge established patterns of control and authority and to anticipate new political acts.'

From these literatures on children's mundane politics there are two points of departure through which we build our argument. First, Bartos (2013, p. 20) suggests that young people's everyday politics does not happen in a vacuum, but instead 'is contextual to the everyday lives of their close friends and family around them.' This is important for the context of our work where we consider the everyday senses of the political – the noises and sights which are bound up in everyday political experiences. Noises and sights are shaped by a multiplicity of everyday encounters and relations, encompassing interactions with friends, peers, neighbours, parents, centre managers and teachers – the list is endless. In this vein, our second reference point is the work of Nolas et al. (2017), who make the case for considering the importance of political talk and the ways in which it is woven into everyday life. They argue that a focus on political talk opens up space for seeing 'a sonic landscape of multiple and overlapping past and present voices in which talking politics might unfold in everyday life' (Nolas et al., 2017, p. 80).

We build on and extend the work of Bartos (2013) and Nolas et al. (2017) in two key ways. First, whilst we seek to build on the sonic geographies of the political, we broaden



the remit of what can be considered a spoken politics, arguing that this is more than having opinions on and contributing to a national Political agenda, whether through elections, Political events or voting (Nolas et al., 2017). In the case of our research, it is about being political through voice, including what is said and unsaid in the shaping and making of communities. Second, we build on existing theorisations of the political to think about the role of senses in everyday politics, in terms of what it sounds and looks like from a young person's perspective. In doing this, we are aware of not essentialising young people's political potential, and so the first part of the paper addresses the multiple rules and regulations which shape their everyday experiences of local Politics in their communities.

In arguing for a better understanding of the senses of everyday politics as experienced by young people, it is useful to draw on the analytical concept of liminality (see also Christensen et al., 2017); the spaces and times of 'in-betweenness' (Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1960). We show that young people's bodies at times experience a liminal state of being, socially, spatially and temporally, and that their capacity to be P/ political is closely related to this liminal status (Christensen et al., 2017). With anthropological roots, van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967) set the context for the use of liminality as an analytical construct to understand thresholds. Indeed, the Latin for threshold is *limen*; as discussed by Matthews (2003), the word signals an entrance, boundary, starting point or moment of transition. Turner (1967) identified liminality as a state of 'betwixt and between', as part of the 'in-betweenness' that people experience at times of transition. On the one hand, liminality can be used to describe the in-between spaces of childhood and adulthood (Skelton, 2013), where societal, structural, political, economic and cultural factors position young people's bodies as being in a site of flux, where young people are neither a child nor an adult (Wells, 2015). On the other hand, we can address the potential of liminal spaces; Matthews (2003) for example, constructs 'the street,' outdoor, and public spaces as liminal. For him, these are spaces which constitute the lived experience of in-betweenness, spaces which are both sites of surveillance and control, but also spaces of opportunity and resistance. In a similar vein, classrooms and playgrounds can be seen through a liminal lens, as both spaces of control, but also spaces of youthful political potential (Wood, 2012).

In the context of our research, we find children and young people's bodies occupying borderland spaces in their newly-built neighbourhoods (i.e. boarded up construction sites); it is in this context that we shed light on how these liminal spaces are sites of political potential. Indeed, we recognise that young people's experiences of liminality 'may not be entirely negative or powerless' (Wood, 2015, p. 11); as shown elsewhere, young people have a political capacity as 'edge walkers' (Tupuola, 2004) in their communities, developing socio-spatial tactics to perform and act within these spaces. It is in the context of newly-built communities and through in-depth research with young people that we can more fully understand what an everyday politics looks and feels like from a young person's perspective. We show the political potential which emerges from spaces of liminality and argue that sound, sight and young people's bodies play an active role in shaping everyday politics and community making.



## Research design and methodology

To examine these issues, we draw on a large scale, ethnographic research project on the everyday lives of 175 children and young people (aged 9–16) living in four newly-built communities in the Milton Keynes/South Midlands growth area. This multi-faceted project explored young people's everyday mobilities, their citizenship, participation and their interaction with sustainable and eco urban design. Data was acquired through a mixed method approach that included: i) individual and peer group interviews on everyday mobility, citizenship and sustainability; ii) a GPS activity and mobile phone rolling survey, exploring the everyday mobilities of the research participants; iii) a community guided walk led by the children and young people, and iv) intensive ethnographic participant observation as part of the thirty-week period spent in each community (for more details on the methodologies and broader project see Christensen et al., 2017).

The case study sites were chosen as they were conceived within and built as part of the UK Labour government's commitment to Sustainable Communities. The case studies were selected on the basis of their emphasis on 'creating communities', their integration of technological solutions to sustainable living, and the inclusion of residents from across the socio-economic spectrum through the provision of diverse housing types. For the context of this paper, it is important to acknowledge a key requirement of the house-building policy in that it was designed to ensure the 'effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses, especially in the planning, design and long-term stewardship of their community' (ODPM [Office of the Deputy Prime Minister], 2003, p. 5). It is with this in mind that we unpack young people's experiences of living in a place which was designed to be inclusive and participatory.

Here we specifically draw on data from two of our four case study communities. The first is Romsworth,<sup>1</sup> a settlement of approximately 900 homes of mixed styles and sizes, situated in a rural location. From the outset the land on which Romsworth was built was sold with the premise and ethos of community building, with advertisements inviting potential residents to *come and create your own community*. Branded as a village with a plethora of local services and amenities (including: a local shop, nursery, doctors, primary school, café and community centre), numerous associations and community groups have been established. The second, Hettonbury, of which initial plans granted 1,000 homes, was built as an urban extension to a pre-existing settlement with a commitment to sustainable forms of eco-architecture. This development was severely impacted by the downturn in the economy, with large swathes of land remaining clear for future building work (during the fieldwork in 2010).

Whilst the two case study sites are similar in terms of being newly-built places informed by the Sustainable Communities agenda, they are socially, culturally and physically different in terms of 'building-in community.' In Romsworth residents were encouraged to get involved in local decision making and community building from the outset, whereas Hettonbury was designed via a formal Design Code, bringing together involving diverse stakeholders in the planning phase. They were thus ideal sites for exploring the multiple politics of 'being young' in such spaces. The data which informs this paper is specifically drawn from: i) peer group discussions on 'participation and citizenship' (Romsworth: 13 interviews with 40 participants; Hettonbury: 24 interviews

with 59 participants); ii) ethnographic observations; iii) 21 interviews with key community stakeholders (including local residents, members of Resident's Associations, youth leaders and the local council) and iv) data from two community engagement workshops ran by the researchers together with young participants (each workshop attended by 30 young people and key adult stakeholders including representatives from the Residents' Association, local Police and the Parish Council). The peer group sessions were thematically based so that similarities and points of convergence could be identified across the sample. Key themes included: i) young people as global and local citizens; ii) 'having a say' and participation and iii) young people's perceptions of community responsibilities. All research conformed to institutional ethical procedures, with consent granted from parents and guardians and from the young people themselves. Participants were drawn from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and data was collated with a consideration of local geographies (streets, shops, housing and green spaces, and different phases of the development) and a regard for length of residency.

### **Newly-built communities: sites and spaces of in/formal rules and regulations**

An overwhelming theme in our data analysis was the multiple exclusions which young people encountered on an everyday basis. Young people were excluded from certain spaces in their community, side-lined on the basis of their age and unable to participate in formal (structural) processes of participation (principally designed and facilitated by adults) (see also Christensen et al., 2017). Our young participants at times occupied liminal spaces, experiencing a combination of being in-place and out-of-place: on the one hand, they moved through, played in and interacted with community spaces, but on the other hand they occupied the threshold of 'in-between separation and incorporation' (Wood, 2015, p. 10). These liminal spaces often took the form of sites of delayed construction (see Kraftl et al., 2013 for further details of how young people experienced living on a construction site) and spaces which were imbued with a whole series of rules and regulations. The exclusion of young people from public space in contemporary Britain is well documented, particularly in terms of their everyday experiences of children's parks, city centre streets and shopping centres (see, for example, Cahill, 2000; Matthews, 2003; Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 2000; Valentine, 1996). Despite the rhetoric that public space is crucial for everyday mobility and well-being (Design Council UK, 2016), the resounding perception is that young people are 'deviant others' in such spaces (Hopkins, 2010). Young bodies in public space are thus often subject to spatial and temporal exclusions based on wider Political agendas (in the UK for example, see Home Office, 2014).

Here we show the multiple ways in which young people were excluded from their communities through a complex web of in/formal rules and regulations. Despite the rhetoric of Sustainable Communities being signified by inclusivity and diversity, our research found that young people living in these newly-built developments were habitually excluded from courtyards, buildings, woods and grassed areas. Time and time again they were told, prompted, and reminded by adult residents that they were not welcome, whether verbally or visually (with signs, locks and deliberate restrictions over access). There are numerous examples from across both case study sites which can

be used to illustrate this. First we begin with a space which was designed and built as a community asset. We have written about this space elsewhere (see Christensen et al., 2017) but essentially, it was centrally located in Romsworth and described in development guidelines as a place intended as a hub for local residents. Indeed, young people considered the centre to be a key site within the community. The building comprised a large hall, meeting rooms, a bar, toilets, changing rooms and an office. This space was used by diverse groups (e.g. the Women's Institute, a painting group, a mother and toddler group, and a local Brownies group) for an array of community functions (e.g. a summer fair, pantomime, and bonfire party). The bar area at one end of the building (comprising of large leather seats, dining tables and a television) was a frequently mentioned meeting place by adults in our research. The centre was run by a management team which reported directly to the Resident Association group and was supported by a number of temporary staff. A sense of 'community' exuded from this space. Visual clues suggested that this was a key site where 'community' happened, including the bunting, which fluttered around the façade and the messages on the notice boards that promoted events and activities.

However, counter to the visual clues that this was a space of inter-generational cohesiveness, we found the centre to be a site of tension in relation to young people's access to the space and the resources. Children and young people's activities were shaped by a strict set of regulations. A large board of rules was placed in a prominent position. Five out of the seven regulations were directed towards young people, with explicitly stated expectations about *'being good'* and *'respecting the building and toys'*. Numerous young participants were perplexed as to why the system was not imposed on *all* people, rather than just the young, and they cited examples of adults 'being out of control' when under the influence of alcohol in this space. Another rule was that young people were not allowed in the centre, unless accompanied by an adult. This was particularly problematic for young people who were waiting to be collected after a dance class or youth group and those who needed to use the facilities whilst out playing. The quote below is from one of our young participants aged 10, describing a time when she was asked to leave the building and stand in the rain to wait for her mother (she had been attending a youth group session in the main hall):

'then someone came out of the bar and said that we had to stand outside and we weren't allowed to stay in the centre, we had to stand outside' (Liz, female, aged 10).

The centre managers spoke at length about the rules and regulations put in place to control young people's access to the building:

'[T]hey've made that a children's room ... [but] within twenty minutes [the toys were] everywhere and they won't put them away, so in the end we closed it down and made it into a pool room'

'Kids come and do whatever they wish, they run riot, up and down the corridor and all that kind of stuff'

'We had a traffic light system at one stage, you know, they'd give you a yellow, which is a first warning, then a, and oh I don't know what, you got a red, get a second, they'd got, it was like you were, you were asked to leave'

(Centre committee member, male)

These rules and regulations were to a large extent accepted by young people. Although they often expressed frustration about these arrangements, there were relatively few instances of subversion. If anything, there was a taken-for-grantedness among the young people that this was an adult-dominated space. One young participant, for example, spoke of the centre 'allowing' the youth group meetings to take place, with adults effectively lending them the hall for a limited period. In various ways, young people experienced the space as ambiguous and difficult to understand. They had to interpret the material and visual prompts of bunting, posters and colour coded systems. Young people at the outset took community centre to mean a free space, accessible and open to all members of the community. However, in reality, it was a liminal zone, where young bodies teetered on a threshold between being welcome and unwelcome, separated and incorporated.

The participants' experience of being spatially and temporally excluded from a public space, indeed one called a 'community centre', had significant implications for children and young people's experiences of belonging as well as their subsequent opportunities for local Political participation (as we will show later, the centre was used as a hub for local Political engagement and community participation). These experiences of exclusion were akin to those cited in the literature on young people's exclusions from the street and shopping centres (Matthews, 2003).

There were other examples of formal rules and regulations that had been 'built-in' to the making of these new urban spaces. In Hettonbury this was evident in the form of gates, fences and locks on courtyards. The courtyards were intended for resident parking, but some had also been planned as playful spaces with infrastructures woven into their design. There was a circulating narrative in our discussions with young people that children were only meant to play in the courtyard which was part of their housing block. Of course, this interrupted the playful routines of children and their friends, as these often spanned several housing blocks. It was not long into our research, however, that we found out that children swapped the security codes for the gates, as a means to circumvent the rules of the place:

'No, this isn't ours, ours is the next one ... we play, we've got, [friend] opens the gates for us to go in ... we think it's not actually fair because they get a big slide and stuff in theirs ... we just get a little grass patch thing in the corner' [Alice, female, aged 12].

In addition to formal rules which young people found themselves navigating, there were a series of unwritten regulations which shaped young people's everyday experience of their communities. The example which follows, from Hettonbury, is emblematic of the difficulties which young people had in interpreting ownership of land in these newly-built spaces. Parcels of woodland, pockets of grass, trees on the edge of farmland were all inscribed with a set of unwritten rules and regulations. In the following quotes, two of our young participants describe a wooded area in their community, perfect for den building and being with their friends. Whilst playing, both had been approached by an adult and told not to play in this space, and then threatened with police action:

'But once I was, I was playing in there and this man came along and said you're not allowed in there and if we go in there he said they'll ring the police on us' (Sasha, female, aged 10).

'Well that's where I come, but ... and then the Manager of [Hettonbury] said we weren't allowed in there anymore ... I think his name is [Darren]... I think he is, I don't know ... I think his name is [Darren], I don't know but he said if, if he sees us in there again then he'll call the police' (Anne-Marie, female, aged 11).

The examples we have shown so far have been indicative of young people's experiences of being physically excluded from certain spaces in their community. We now move on to acknowledge a series of rules which were apparent around young people's participation in local Political decision making. Young people from Romsworth were particularly vocal about the importance of their residence and participation in community life. They would argue that we 'live here too' and thus sought to take hold of a status that would allow them opportunities to 'have a say' given that they were 'part of the community.' Young people frequently articulated a series of perceptions related to their participation in community-based decision making, including: i) their status as young people; ii) being only temporary residents and iii) not having the capacity to make well-informed decisions.

As researchers, we participated in local meetings of the boards of the Parish Council, Residents Associations and community centre committees and it was evident that these aforementioned views and assumptions about young people's participation were frequently articulated. The groups were typically under adult management, dominated by males of retirement age. In Romsworth, for example, it was common for the same adults to sit on numerous committees, which led to a relatively small group of actors making decisions on behalf of the community. Across our case study sites, young people were absent from such dialogues, despite their agency being a reoccurring theme of discussion (e.g. their use of public space, their behaviours and the lack of community provision for young people). The minutes of meetings from each of our case study communities were littered with such references. These explicit generational tensions limited and constrained young people's ability to participate in the formal, local Political processes, despite decisions made in these forums ultimately impacting on their experiences of growing up.

Adults on the other hand, had the capacity to access the debates, participate in decision-making, be heard, and decide whether to invite young people into the discussion – in essence, they were able to lay down the rules for young people's participation. In these cases, governmentality (Gallagher, 2008) was exercised by participating adults and experienced by children and young people. Despite the willingness and sometimes expectation of children and young people to be involved in local decision-making, they were firmly excluded. This was understood by the young people themselves as a politics of power, based on assumptions about the competencies of age and synthesised in the associations they made with 'being young'.

As we have shown, the threshold young people occupied was shaped by a web of spoken and unspoken rules and regulations, which habitually resulted in the marginalisation of their voices, bodies, ideas, experiences and emotions from formal local Political processes. However, this marginalisation was further exaggerated by the explicit ways of *doing* the Political (which were, in essence, rules and regulations). In one of our case study sites, there was an attempt (within the period of the fieldwork) to include the perceptions of children and young people in a decision-making process regarding the provision and placement of play facilities.

From an adult perspective, young people exhibited a general lack of interest in this process, and this was interpreted as 'disengagement from the youth'. However, in this instance we found that particular ways of doing the Political were preventing young people's involvement. Adults expressed difficulty in inviting young people to meetings, dissatisfaction that they would not attend ward surgeries and that they did not respond to the invitation of submitting a letter outlining their issues. However, the meetings, councillor surgeries and letters were in fact experienced by young people as institutional barriers to participation. From a young person's perspective, these communication structures were not a suitable way to express their views. With meetings held in spaces from which they were routinely excluded and the use of methods of communication which young people did not have access to, this inadvertently created an environment of exclusion.

In the case of Romsworth, an 'open meeting' specifically for young people was advertised in the local newsletter and held in the centre bar. However, young people did not attend the meeting and as a result there was a reduced investment in youth facilities in the village. In this case, young people were excluded from the process precisely because of the web of rules and regulations surrounding participation (from participation happening in spaces from which young people were routinely excluded to exclusion from the fixed ways in which the Political was expressed and listened to). In a further example, shown in the quote below, a young participant explained that he and his sister went to put up a poster about a missing cat in the centre and were further excluded by a rule which stipulated that it was ten pence to advertise on the community notice board, which was money they did not have with them:

'we had to pay about ten pence to put this up ... ten pence isn't really that much but it was just, it was quite irritating when my sister and I were walking around the village and we came up to ask if we [could] put it on the board and they said oh you can't put it on the board unless you've got ten pence and we didn't have ten pence' (Harry, male, aged 14).

In this section we have shown how newly-built communities have a whole series of rules and regulations woven into them that prevent, inhibit, block and challenge young people's formal participation in local Politics. The analysis now turns to consider everyday politics and the potential of young people's knowledges and bodies in shaping community relations and experiences.

### **The senses of everyday politics: sounds and sights**

Our research has revealed a series of misgivings about the built forms of the Sustainable Communities Political project, a house building agenda which sought to include diverse groups of people in the building of community. The preceding analysis has drawn attention to a series of exclusions based on prominent and circulating rules and regulations, which combined to restrict young people's full participation in their communities. In the current era of large-scale housebuilding and the construction of new communities (see, for example, the Garden Village agenda – Kraftl et al., 2018) this paper moves on to highlight a series of ways in which young people participate, politically, on an everyday basis. Thus, the contribution of this section is two-fold. First, it shows that young people's everyday politics matters in the building of new urban places. Second, it is our intention to show what the political looks and feels like to young people. Here we build on recent

research into everyday politics (e.g. Bartos, 2013 on politics and friendship) to develop an explicit analysis into what an everyday politics sounds, looks and feels like from a young person's perspective. This manoeuvre extends work by Nolas et al. (2017, p. 80) who analysed the 'phenomenology of political talk ... to see a sonic landscape of multiple and overlapping past and present voices in which talking politics might unfold in everyday life.' However, this work focused predominantly on Political talk, such as the discussions of elections, voting and Political agendas. In our analysis we ask what an everyday politics looks like and we shed light on the multiple senses of the political, including the sounds and sights of young people's everyday political experiences.

We were struck by young people's discussion of sound in relation to their experiences of everyday politics. Noise and voice featured prominently in young people's accounts, and were associated with respecting neighbours, being attuned to diversity, and being mindful of the role of voice in articulating for change. In what follows, we reflect first on young people's awareness of noise in the making and on-goingness of community. During interviews, young people were asked to reflect on 'whose responsibility it should be to ...' as a prompt for a series of questions about building a new community. In reflecting on the responsibilities associated with 'respecting neighbours', out of 42 responses, 11 said that this was just the responsibility of young people, six believed that it was the responsibility of adults, and 23 argued that both adults and young people were responsible for respecting their neighbours. However, what struck us in these discussions was young people's reference to noise. Of those young people that thought 'respecting neighbours' was a young persons' responsibility, here they predominantly referred to the noise children make when they are playing. The rationale being that children make noise and this should be kept to a minimum to respect privacy. Of those that believed adults were responsible, again noise featured in their accounts, with references to noisy neighbours, adults having parties with music and the builders making noise with their machinery. The majority of young participants acknowledged this joint responsibility of adults and children, with mutual respect needed (principally in relation to noise) if all were to live in the same community. In the first quote below, the young person reflects on the noise which keeps her awake at night and in the second, the participant considers the everyday politics associated with co-living:

'It's always at night for me, if I'm trying to get to sleep ... I hear this click, click, clack, clack ... engines going, motorbikes going past' (Jane, female, aged 10).

'You have to respect that they live here too; it's not just 'us' (Suzie, female, aged 12).

A further aspect of sound, which was evident in our discussions of everyday political actions, was in young people's accounts of helping others. This links to research on everyday politics and friendship; indeed Bartos (2013: 20) reminds us that 'friendships are not only demonstrations of positive sociality, but can also be fraught with power dimensions and reproduce geographies of inclusions and exclusions.' The example below is about a form of friendship, an act of kindness and an awareness of an everyday politics of difference. One of our young participants described a situation on her school bus. She reflected on overhearing a young Year 7 girl being bullied about where she lived, and the negative connotations associated with that particular street. In response, our young participant took action and spoke back. In this example the young participant



was doing her part in challenging negative stereotypes (which circulated about the street in which this young person lived). This quote shows an everyday politics of people and place, mediated and negotiated through sound and voice:

*'She is in Year 7, I am in Year 9 ... you could kind of hear it going on ... 'you're a shank, you live in [name of street]' and stuff ... and I found out about it and I was like 'well pack it in' ... she didn't come to school for ages ... they said 'it's nothing to do with you' and I said 'yeah it is, because if you're insulting her you're insulting me, because we both live in the same street' (Ellie, female, aged 14).*

Through this example and an attention to the sounds of everyday politics, we see the active role that young people played in their communities, as mediators of difference (Korkiamaki & Kallio, 2018). Indeed, there were other examples of young people demonstrating how they used their voices in everyday political action. Whilst there is much in the literature about the place of young people's voice in formal Political forums (i.e. on school councils and youth parliaments), this is not so evident in examples of everyday political experiences. On the one hand, young people made it clear that they were routinely excluded from formal Political processes on the basis of a whole series of rules and regulations in their communities. However, on the other hand, there were countless examples of young people showing how they used their relationships with adults – whether it be parents, family friends, neighbours or teachers – to facilitate their everyday political participation. In the example below, Rachel, a young participant mentions her neighbour, whom she would turn to if she needed support with asking for facilities and services in the village:

*'probably the next door neighbour because he like, he sorts everything out for us really ... he's really helpful so I'd probably like just go to him or talk over the fence' (Rachel, female, aged 10).*

Indeed, young people in our research were also acutely aware of the voices of others in constructing their awareness of Political issues in their communities. This resonates with the work of Nolas et al. (2017: 79), who found that political talk 'lurk[s] on the edge of adult activity ... emerg[ing] in intimate, safe, everyday informal environments.' The following account is indicative of the ongoing Political negotiations which young people heard and spoke about in the building of their community. At the time of the fieldwork in Romsworth there were heated discussions regarding the allocation of land for a Public House versus additional housing. In the excerpt below, Nick shows his awareness of this issue, based on circulating discussions of building processes and land acquisitions:

*'again it has been ruled by money and space ... there's the thing of where you would build it [the church], who's going to buy the land? ... my Dad said to me ... oh well we'll get a pub soon ... they built the Centre, then they built the shop and the medics' (Nick, male, aged 14).*

We have shown how sound (i.e. voice and noise) are important components of everyday politics. We now turn to the multiple ways in which sight is enmeshed in young people's political expressions, including through: i) daily observations of infrastructure changes; and ii) an acute awareness of social change and boundaries in enacting everyday politics. We argue elsewhere that young people's local knowledges of their spatial surroundings is closely linked to their everyday outdoor mobilities, intergenerational

encounters, interactions and observations (Christensen et al., 2017). Through movement, sensory engagement and observation, young people came to know about the spatial layout of their neighbourhoods and the intricate details of their materiality (Horton et al., 2014). We have already highlighted young people's awareness of Political community issues based on circulating rumours and the involvement of young people in listening and speaking about the progress of development. However, young people did not just hear about these issues; they were keenly aware of the visual progress of the build. They gave vivid accounts of the ongoing processes of 'digging up' and relaying of road and pavement surfaces. Participants also spoke of a disconnected building process, where the services (electricity, water and sewerage) were not installed in synchrony during the construction cycle, thus wasting money and time. Young people were entwined in a web of relationships with builders, contractors, the land, bricks and of course the dust. It was with diverse actors that an everyday politics was grounded and negotiated.

So far we have reflected on young people's visual perceptions of infrastructural change. However, their accounts were also littered with social observations, providing another important anchor point in their enacting of everyday politics. We have written elsewhere about the role that young people played in the welcoming of new neighbours into their community; they were the ones who spotted the removal vans arriving, saw their neighbours unload and were pivotal in the welcoming process (Christensen et al., 2017). In discussions with young people about moving in, they would speak of the waves, the smiles, the nods, the cakes and the cards through which others were welcomed into their community. Embodiment played a hugely important role in this everyday political action; being aware of body language, the nods, the smiles, and the waves was an important part of creating a welcoming environment. Young people were accustomed to seeing and to embodying these welcoming practices.

### Using the body as a political tool

We have emphasised the importance of young people's senses in their experiences of everyday politics, including the ways in which sound and sight were crucial for their contribution to community making and an everyday politics of negotiation. In discussing the political potential of young people in their communities, many of our participants spoke of petitions as a P/political tool as a way in which they could seek change in their communities (Bartos, 2012). The quotes below are indicative of this, emphasising the multiple bodies which are needed to make change, the need for formal meetings, signatures and complaints:

'get a petition ... you get like a sheet of paper and they you get loads of people to sign it ... who agree with what you're saying ... once you've got about, I don't know, about two hundreds signs or more ... you take it to a meeting, organise a meeting with like the person in charge and then give them these signatures' (Rosie, female, aged 12).

'if that was going to happen then like [name of friend] said, if they first wrote a letter then secondly come there yourself, if that doesn't work, get a range of people to come and then make a huge complaint at them ... make a meeting about it' (Kevin, male, aged 10).

Despite the challenges which have previously been discussed about young people being involved in formal meetings and adult centred processes, young people believed

that it was as a collective, multiple bodies together, that change could be made. However, as we evidence in this paper, there are multiple ways of being political. Indeed, it was the literal presence of young people's bodies in certain spaces at certain times which contributed to the everyday P/politics of place. Further details of this example can be found in Kraftl (2014) and Christensen et al. (2017) but for the purposes of this illustration, we show how the very presence of young bodies in a liminal zone (literally) led to a positive change in the community (through the opening up of a community space for all to use). Through our everyday ethnographic encounters in Hettonbury, we found that young people were appropriating unfinished spaces in their communities, including, in particular, The Square, a wide-open space designed to be an amphitheatre for community events.

Given the stalled progress and the downturn in the construction industry (as a result of the economic crisis of 2009/2010), The Square remained boarded up for many months. As the fieldwork progressed, holes started to appear, panels were lifted and young people squeezed their small bodies into this large open space, so as to play and socialise. Young people thus appropriated this liminal zone. It was the presence of young bodies in this space, over several months, along with their skateboards and scooters that prompted the Residents' Association to campaign for the removal of the fencing. The very presence of young people's bodies in this liminal zone gave the Residents' Association the impetus and bargaining tool to be able to re-claim the space. The result was the opening up of The Square for the benefit of the whole community. This example is itself political but at the same time a fuzzy boundary had crossed into the Political, given the community negotiations and involvement of numerous government stakeholders in the decision to remove the barriers and open The Square ahead of schedule.

Despite the persistence of these efforts to exclude young people from the formal local Political agenda through a series of in/formal rules and regulations, young people nevertheless did continue to participate in an everyday politics. We have evidenced the importance of sound, sight and the place of young people's bodies in disrupting, challenging, negotiating and shaping the everyday political goings-on of newly-built communities.

## **Conclusion: the place and political potential of young people**

This paper has evidenced a *multiple P/politics of being young* in newly-built communities in the UK, a context designed and promoted to be participatory, inclusive and convivial. Through ethnographic research we investigated young people's movements, bodies, interactions and voices in community centres, squares and parks, and we have shown how these bodies occupied a liminal position which both marginalised and made space for P/political encounters. In examining this liminality, we identified several significant barriers to young people's Political participation in their communities. A series of in/formal rules and regulations limited young people's Political potential and active involvement in ostensibly adult spaces and agendas. We were well aware that young people are marginalised in these Political spaces, locally, regionally and nationally (Lansdown, 2004; Percy-Smith, 2010; Wood, 2012). However, our research sites were built and intended, Politically, to promote 'effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses, especially in the planning, design and long-term

stewardship of their community' (ODPM [Office of the Deputy Prime Minister], 2003, p. 5). Such a disjuncture between aspiration and actuality was worrying, especially as these places appeared to have the social, structural, economic and Political ingredients necessary for inclusion, and yet were still failing to be inclusive.

We have evidenced an everyday politics in diverse moments and spaces ranging from the nods and smiles of welcoming new neighbours to young bodies appropriating liminal spaces. We began from the premise that adult researchers should 'not be demanding that they [young people] are somehow knowingly political' (Philo & Smith, 2013, p.143) and we acknowledged the difficulty in deciding what may or may not be politics, with the caveat of rendering everything young people do as political (Kallio & Hakli, 2015). However, many young people in our project were ostensibly aware of their everyday political potential and the important contribution they could make to the P/political project, based on their local knowledge and everyday experiences of their communities. We have shown that on an everyday basis individually, collectively, knowingly and unknowingly young people helped to shape the P/political landscapes of their communities. Indeed, Kallio and Hakli (2015, p.13) comment that 'politics can be practiced by anyone, or even anything, which allows for the politicisation of new issues and the recognition of a variety of agencies.' Here we are attuned to young bodies occupying borderlands where their interactions and knowledge contribute to an everyday politics. It is important to reiterate that we do not claim to know (or want to know) everything that is political in young people's lives, however through getting to know our young participants we saw how these moments mattered to them and formed part of the multiple P/politics of being young. We have built on the existing literature on everyday politics (Bartos, 2012; Nolas et al., 2017; Staeheli et al., 2012) to make the case for closer attention to the everyday senses of the political, so as to further understand the role of young people in the building of communities.

We can conclude by noting that there is much more work to be done in the Political realm for promoting social sustainability. The active exclusion of young people from community spaces where local Politics was enacted was a particular frustration for them. The centre in Romsworth was a liminal space for many of our young participants (Thomassen, 2009), and their experiences of marginalisation were compounded by a series of in/formal rules and regulations. The cultures of communication prevented young people from participating (either formally or informally) in local Political dialogues and negotiations. These difficulties notwithstanding, it is important to highlight young people's everyday politics – including the moments and interactions between young people, adults, spaces and infrastructures – that shaped community relations and experiences.

Through shedding light on liminal spaces and bodies, and states and sites of in-betweenness (Wood, 2015), we have shown that young people's knowledges, their interactions and their potential for collective action shape the experiences of the wider community in often unnoticed but nevertheless profound ways. The sights and sounds of everyday politics mattered to young people; these interactions were vital for the ongoing development of social, physical and cultural dimensions of community life. Awareness of family and community relations, building progress, tensions, opportunities and mobilities are grounded in everyday politics. Young people and their families were moving into new spaces where histories were being made, committees being formed,

decisions enacted, funding allocated and people from different backgrounds meeting and living alongside one another. Much of the 'community building' happens in the days, weeks and months of moving-in; using this example, we show that young people were keenly and emotionally involved in this process, a process which is entwined in social politics, a politics of space, a politics of power, a politics of community building. Young people showed that their affectual energies were woven into the everyday politics of making a community work, together with their knowledges and bodily presence in threshold spaces (which clearly demonstrated their P/political potential).

There is much work to be done in acknowledging and drawing on young people's everyday politics in the process of community building and decision-making. There needs to be a concerted recognition of everyday political acts beyond formalised committees, meetings and spaces, recognising the embodied vital political capacity that young people hold in shaping the spaces they live. The multiple P/politics of being young draws attention to a blurring of the P/political (Philo & Smith, 2013), a blurring of the boundaries where liveliness can be found, and a consideration of the sights and sounds of everyday politics (as experienced by young people). In this regard we advocate for community spaces (i.e. centres and parks) to be inter-generational, physically, socially and culturally. Young people's access to such facilities is vital in the process of community making. Community based planning, decision-making and formal Political processes need to overcome the 'I'm big, you're small, I'm right, you're wrong' attitude to young people's P/political participation. Young people's senses and embodied practices have much to offer the Political project; everyday politics matters in the building and shaping of communities.

## Note

1. The case-study names are both pseudonyms.

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